

across the landscape in response to various sources of disturbance (*e.g.*, fire, flooding, grazing, crop production) combined with long- and short-term weather patterns. In the past, more dense vegetation along permanent and intermittent stream channels, alluvial fans, and sagebrush plains probably provided travel corridors and dispersal habitat for pygmy rabbits between appropriate use areas (Green and Flinders 1980a; Weiss and Verts 1984; WDFW 1995a). Since European settlement of the western United States, more dense vegetation associated with some human activities (*e.g.*, fence rows, roadway shoulders, crop margins, abandoned fields) may have also acted as avenues of dispersal between local populations of pygmy rabbits (Green and Flinders 1980a; Pritchett *et al.* 1987).

#### *Prehistoric Distribution*

There is very little information currently available regarding the

prehistoric distribution of the pygmy rabbit throughout the majority of its range. However, the pygmy rabbit has been present within the Columbia Basin, a geographic area that extends from northern Oregon through eastern Washington (Quigley *et al.* 1997), for over 100,000 years (Lyman 1991). This population segment, which we refer to as the Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit, is believed to have been disjunct from the remainder of the species' range since at least the early Holocene (10,000 to 7,000 years before present (BP)), as suggested by the fossil record (Grayson 1987; Lyman 1991). This separation is in contrast to the relatively short-term, local patterns of isolation, extirpation, and recolonization that likely occur throughout pygmy rabbit range (see above). The Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit probably had a broader distribution during the mid-Holocene (roughly 7,000 to 3,000 years BP) (Lyman 1991). Gradual climate change

affecting the distribution and composition of sagebrush communities is thought to have resulted in a reduction of the Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit's range during the late Holocene (3,000 years BP to present) (Grayson 1987; Lyman 1991).

#### *Historic and Current Distribution*

Columbia Basin pygmy rabbits have been considered rare with local areas of occurrence within the Columbia Basin for many years (Dalquest 1948), although there is little comprehensive information available regarding their historic distribution and abundance within this region (WDFW 1995a). Museum specimens and reliable sight records indicate that Columbia Basin pygmy rabbits probably occurred in portions of at least five Washington counties during the first half of the 1900s, including Douglas, Grant, Lincoln, Adams, and Benton (Figure 2).

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